



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas)
Committee on Homeland Security**

“Aviation Security Challenges: Is TSA ready for the threats of today?”

Remarks as Prepared

Two weeks ago, a terrorist struck in America’s heartland - inspired by a hateful ideology – and killed five American soldiers on U.S. soil. Fourteen years after 9/11, not only are we still under threat from Islamist terrorists, but they have gone on the offensive globally and expanded their footprint. Radicalism is on the rise, and the war is being brought to our doorsteps at terrifying speed.

We have long known that our aviation sector is the crown jewel of terrorist targets, so as we stare down these real and growing threats, Congress and the American people need confidence in our defenses. In the past few months, TSA has given us concern rather than confidence. Terrorists have to be right only once, and we have to be right 100 % of the time. As millions of travelers from all over the world pass through our nation’s airports, the American people must know and trust that the procedures and policies put in place make us safer.

In June, we learned through leaked reports from the Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Inspector General, that TSA’s passenger screening was wrong 96% of the time, and that seventy-three aviation workers had potential ties to terrorism. These findings shatter public confidence. A reported 96% failure rate to detect explosives is completely unacceptable.

Administrator Neffenger has an opportunity to right this ship. In our discussions, he has displayed candor, and an open mind in his approach to this critical position. In my opinion, TSA needs to do three things in order to move forward to a new chapter: 1) restore public confidence, 2) enhance risk-based security; and 3) better-leverage the private sector.

We have seen a large expansion of risk-based security initiatives since 2011; however, we still need to do more. TSA’s PreCheck program has been in place for four years, however, currently only 4% of travelers are members of this program. TSA needs to increase this population, so that it can focus its efforts on more thoroughly screening those passengers who are unknown and pose a bigger risk.

I would like to explore how TSA can better-leverage the private sector. The private sector plays a critically important role in securing our nation's aviation system. TSA does not and cannot fulfill its mission alone. The private sector is a necessary partner that TSA needs to continue to rely on in order to successfully fulfill its mission.

TSA and the Department need to look to the future and give the private sector a roadmap of what screening will look like five, ten and fifteen years from now. This can help companies developing technologies meet these needs. We cannot expect private companies to invest tens of millions of dollars, if we cannot provide them any certainty on a return on their investment.

Additionally, TSA needs to make necessary reforms in order to enhance the Screening Partnership Program. These partnerships allow airports to hire private screeners instead of government employees. This program has been in place since 2004, and yet TSA is still unable to do an accurate cost comparison that takes into account the full cost of a federal employee compared to a private sector employee doing the same job.

This gap allows TSA to argue that private screeners do not save the taxpayer money, although this is not a fair and accurate accounting assessment. This committee is dedicated to reforming TSA. We proved our commitment to this effort by passing four important pieces of legislation on the House floor on Monday that will keep Americans safe.

This legislation came out of this Committee as a result of the recent TSA failures. Specifically, these bills will help strengthen and secure the PreCheck program, improve the vetting process for aviation employees, help keep our airport screening equipment better maintained and implement better accountability policies at local airports for contractors.

The bottom line is this: the threat is evolving, but Americans are concerned that TSA is not keeping up. Administrator Neffenger, you have a tough job ahead of you to lead this agency. But we look forward to working with you to reform TSA—and today we are eager to hear about your plans to do exactly that.

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